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Mr. Rostow Presents a Paper

A 'secret' document focuses attention on a key idea man of foreign policy planning.

By PETER LISAGOR

WASHINGTON.

THE recent controversy over a working paper prepared by the State Department's Policy Planning Council under the direction of the body's chairman, Walt Whitman Rostow, was almost inevitable. One of the inviolate rules in Washington is that any official who crackles with ideas and proposals about America's proper role in the world and who puts them down in a "secret document" that "leaks" even in small drips to the press, is courting a command performance before a nervous Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Rostow made the grade sooner rather than later. The committee summoned him to explain the document, which was designed to serve as a basic paper for the National Security Council on United States policy and purpose in the world and how both might be effectively pursued. Several Republicans had charged, on the basis of the "leaks," that it adopted a dangerous attitude toward the Soviet Union.

Rostow emerged unwounded—even, by all accounts, won the committee's admiration with his lucid, articulate recital of his views. Still, he might well keep himself on tap in the future; a man noted for his prolific output of ideas and challenging concepts, and engaged in planning policy in a period of vast, often unpredictable changes, is a near cinch for a repeat performance. This kind of a man in this kind of a world makes politicians uneasy, and the business of planning tends further to add to their discomfort.

When Secretary of State George C. Marshall gave the Policy Planning Council (it was then called Staff) its original mandate back in May, 1947, he said that it should not be "deluged with small stuff," meaning that it should not be forced to pay grudging attention to incoming cables and daily operational responsibilities. Its members, Marshall prescribed, should be "highly qualified thinkers * * * strong in character and intelligence." The Second World War had ended this country's isolationism and, in Marshall's view, the United States would remain too deeply immersed in world affairs to leave policy-planning strictly to the political improvisers.

Under its first head, George F. Kennan, the Planning Staff was conceived as a big-picture coterie, with a wide-screen vision of politico-military problems and a capacity for looking ahead. It was to avoid jumping from crisis to crisis and concentrate on how the United States could help to shape the world—five, ten or twenty years hence.

MARSHALL'S intentions were laudable, but authentic planning requires a firm foundation, whether for community development or for world order. In the intervening fifteen years, from Kennan to Rostow, the State Department's chief planners have had to make their way in bad international weather through marshy terrain.

Whether planning as an institutional function ever met Marshall's prescription for it is questionable. Critics of it claim that it has not. They cite a number of supporting reasons: too often in the past, members of the staff, or council, have been time-serving Foreign Service officers with no special gift for prevision or analysis; some Secretaries of State have treated it indulgently as a game in prophecy and probabilities; it has been too remote from the mainstream of events to provide effective guidance; its head seldom has been sufficiently marinated in Americana to know or care about what makes Americans tick and, finally, institutional planning is inherently inadequate, especially in a swift-changing world.

"The Policy Planning Council, taken collectively," says one of these knowledgeable critics, "has had less impact on foreign policy than Walter Lippmann."

This critic would make a distinction, however, between the institution and its director or chairman, and concede that the latter, as a fount of thought, proposals and recommendations, has had a demonstrable impact on Secretaries of State and Presidents, not to mention Lippmann. "Policy planning is really nothing much more than having a few smart, imaginative, quick-minded people around who are listened to," he says.

THE 45-year-old Rostow must be marked down as a chairman with influence. "He is a natural planner and has been doing it for years," says an Administration official acquainted with Rostow's role in shaping President Kennedy's concepts and understanding of both world and domestic problems when the Chief Executive was a Senator from Massachusetts doing some long-range planning of his own.

The record bears out this judgment. For somewhere in the President's files there must be a Rostow memorandum on every conceivable subject of government, from disarmament to race relations in the South, from the wage-price relationship in the domestic economy to the proper use of nuclear weapons, from the problems of inflation and productivity in the United States to the strategy of foreign aid.

Almost from the day he met Senator Kennedy in the late winter of 1958, Rostow started discharging salvos of ideas and advice. "In the intellectual gearing-up of Senator Kennedy for the Presidential campaign," says a Kennedy associate, "Walt Rostow was good. He could weave together a lot of diverse strands, Berlin, Laos, the economy, and do it fast. Of all the Cambridge crowd, he was most accessible, most versatile, and most for Kennedy. He was an early volunteer as a campaign soldier."

EVEN before he met the Senator, Rostow had been doing some lofty thinking for the Government as a consultant to the Eisenhower Administration. He took time out from his post as a professor of economic history at Massachusetts Institute of Technology to preside over the so-called Quantico Panel which produced the "open skies" proposal that President Eisenhower laid in the lap of the surprised comrades, Khrushchev and Bulganin, at the Geneva summit conference in 1955. He had an influential hand in other Eisenhower pronouncements, including a speech on the Middle East before the United Nations General Assembly in 1958.

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QUESTIONS—Between hearings last month by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on a policy paper he had drafted, Rostow (left) talks with Senator Dirksen, a G. O. P. critic.

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Rostow left M. I. T. for a sabbatical year in Europe in September, 1958, he had established a solid intellectual rapport with Senator Kennedy. In a series of lectures at Cambridge University in England, he developed a "Non-Communist Manifesto," which was a theoretical rebuttal to Karl Marx's theory of history. His analysis of how nations of the world moved from a primitive economic state through a "take-off" stage to a mature period of high mass consumption was published in a book, "Stages of Economic Growth," which won him an international reputation.

SOVIET critics railed at his doctrine because it rejected the class struggle as a prime factor in history and gave short shrift to communism as a solution to quick economic development. Some conservative economists were critical because of his insistence that growth may be accomplished by a varied mixture of methods and systems.

Rostow was not so engrossed in his Cambridge cogitations that he neglected his contacts with Kennedy. At least one letter a month, full of ideas, suggestions for speeches, action to be taken, was sent either directly to the Senator or through Fred Holborn, a Kennedy assistant at the Capitol. He was urging firm positions on Berlin and Quemoy and Matsu, predicting a probable test of will by the Communists and pointing out the need to keep other vital issues in mind, such as aid to India.

Shortly after his return to M. I. T. in late 1959, Rostow made a speaking tour of the country. "As I went around," he now recalls, "I found there was no single crisis issue. But there was a widespread uneasiness about a lot of things. It was unfocussed, but it was there, and I felt that what this country wanted was to get moving again."

LATER, at a party in Cambridge attended by Kennedy, Rostow suggested the Senator might adopt as his theme "This country is ready to get moving again—and I'm prepared to lead it." Kennedy was not greatly impressed with the idea at first, but Rostow pressed him at subsequent meetings. Finally, in late June, prior to the Democratic Convention at Los Angeles, Rostow took up the theme again in a meeting in Kennedy's Senate office. The two men were still discussing the matter when they reached the airport for a trip to Boston, and there Kennedy made up his mind. "All right, Walt, let's get the country moving again," the Senator said, smiling, as he led Rostow up the ramp of the plane.

Throughout the 1960 campaign, Rostow operated from his Cambridge quarters and continued firing off memoranda and speech ideas, acting now as a member of a group of braintrusters under the direction of Harvard Law Professor Archibald Cox, stationed in Washington.

The day before the President-elect appointed Dean Rusk as Secretary of State, he talked to Rostow about the Policy Planning job and Rostow was amenable. Mr. Kennedy had named several high-powered political figures to State Department posts before selecting Rusk. Once he was named, Rusk understandably insisted upon subordinates of his own choice, and Rostow was not one of them. Rusk wanted George McGhee, an old associate of his in the State Department during the Truman Administration, as his chief Policy planner. Rostow was offered a job as McGhee's deputy, but declined. Kennedy then asked Rostow to join the White House staff as a deputy to McGeorge Bundy, the Presidential assistant for national security affairs, and Rostow agreed.

Predecessors

In the reception room of Walt Rostow's seventh-floor suite in the State Department hang the pictures of five men—his predecessors as head of the Policy Planning Council. Three still toil for the Government in responsible jobs and the two others are consultants on a fairly steady basis.

The five are George F. Kennan, Ambassador to Yugoslavia; Paul H. Nitze, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs; Robert R. Bowie, director of Harvard's Center of International Affairs and part-time consultant to the State Department; Gerard C. Smith, Washington attorney and part-time consultant, and George C. McGhee, Deputy Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs.

In his own words, Rostow "dirtied" himself up in special problems at the White House, the most notable being Southeast Asia. He became a kind of theoretician of anti-guerrilla warfare, and a speech he made to a graduating class of the U. S. Army Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg, N. C., in June, 1961, is regarded as a basic doctrine on American strategy to counter guerrilla war.

Rostow said in that speech that it was "historically inaccurate and psychologically dangerous" to believe that Mao Tse-tung and Cuba's Ché Guevara created the strategy and tactics of guerrilla warfare. They merely echo Marion's operation in the American Revolution, T. E. Lawrence's Arabian experiences, and practices in the Peninsular campaign of the Napoleonic wars. "The orchestration of professional troops, militia and guerrilla fighters is an old game whose rules can be studied and learned," he told the special warriors.

THE nub of his speech was that "Communism is best understood as a disease of the transition to modernization." Weak governments in transition to a modern way of life, he said, are the ones "highly vulnerable to subversion and to guerrilla warfare," and the Communists know that their time to seize power in those unsettled areas is limited. The task of the U. S. must be to "protect the independence of the revolutionary process now going forward," remembering that the primary responsibility for fighting guerrilla actions lies with "those on the spot."

"An outsider cannot, by himself, win a guerrilla war; he can help create conditions in which it can be won; and he can directly assist those prepared to fight for their independence," he said.

Last December, in a major attempt to tidy up and tighten the foreign policy machinery, several White House staff men were shifted to the State Department and Rostow found himself in the position for which he was originally slated. The Policy Planning Staff had been designated a "Council" in February, 1961, for the purpose of elevating the concept of the body as a group of high-level planners, each with a large degree of independence and roughly of equal rank.

One day recently Rostow discussed himself and his ideas of planning. He sat at his desk, true to the New Frontier fashion, in shirtsleeves, brow unfurrowed, determinedly relaxed, a pipe nowhere in sight. If a latter-day Rodin went searching for a model of a Kennedy Administration "Thinker," he probably would give this mild-mannered, soft-spoken man a wide berth. But a little conversation would soon convince the sculptor of Rostow's credentials.

AS Rostow sees American strategy in the world today, it consists of what he calls "five dimensions"—a concept, say those familiar with its contents, reflected in the famous "secret" working paper. Rostow's "dimensions" include a strengthing of the bonds between the more industrialized nations in the northern portion of the free world, including Western Europe, Canada and Japan; support of the "revolution of modernization" in Latin

WITH THE BOSS—Rostow (right) with Secretary of State Rusk.

America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East to achieve a dramatic "turn-around" in their development; the building of a north-south tie in which the industrialized nations of the north will replace the old colonial ties with a new relation of cooperation and partnership; the building of an adequate and flexible military defense that not only will make a direct Communist assault "grossly unattractive and unprofitable," but will close off to Communist incursions "areas of vulnerability" in the underdeveloped world—a component of this dimension is an earnest willingness to turn down the arms race if the Soviets would agree to the essential ingredient, verification and control by effective measures of inspection—and, finally, drawing the nations now under Communist regimes toward the free community, "both by preventing the expansion of communism and by seeking cooperation in specific areas of common interest which we believe will increasingly emerge as the strength, unity and effectiveness of the free community is demonstrated."

"I'M a teacher—I'm a professor, an economist—and I'm proud of it," he says, in recognition of the fact that college professors in government are peculiarly vulnerable to political attack, not only because of a stereotyped hangover from the New Deal but also because many a politician is simply uneasy with anyone who reads and writes books.

"Many of us who now work in Washington were too young to be caught up in the New Deal, but we're products of the second World War, junior-officer class. My first formative job was target planning in the Air Force. We not only worked out the doctrine of precision planning, but the target systems and the targets for the U.S. 15th and 8th Air Force and the R. A. F. It was the whole operating target business.

"People say now we've got a lot of professors in Washington. Sure, but my vision of planning came from a living, breathing war instead of from abstractions. We had to contend with German fighters, the weather and flak, and we had to adjust our calculations to a rapidly shifting situation. Essays on grand strategy wouldn't have been worth a nickel to General Spaatz."

Planning, Rostow says, is "thinking in ways that will lead you to do something that will make the future better. What do we start doing now that we're not doing? What do we stop doing that we're now doing? These are the questions. I am not interested in broad, speculative essays."

Rostow defines his job in another way. "We're trying to see if we can anticipate crises," he observes. "Sometimes you can't head them off. But we're trying to look around the corner. It is no cocktail party cliché that this is a revolutionary world and we're in for chronic crises. The underdeveloped areas are very vulnerable to Communist takeover as they move toward modernization. The Communists are scavengers of this transition."

Rostow has sought to make the Policy Planning Council a focal point for government-wide planning. Every Tuesday he presides over an informal luncheon group from the White House, Defense, Treasury and the Central Intelligence Agency, discussing one major problem for the immediate future and exchanging ideas, views and attitudes about a host of others. Three times a week he meets with his fellow council members and talks out problems and projects he has on the board.

EACH of the fourteen members of the council has a particular area or two for which he is mainly responsible. They work on a series of major problems which Rostow has isolated for early action proposals. For example, he dispatched one of them to Germany after the Berlin wall was built to scout ways of preventing West Berlin from becoming a shell. Out of this mission developed plans to keep the city viable and to reinvigorate it with fresh purpose. Council members work directly with other agencies involved in the planning process, not to produce "think pieces" but to prepare recommendations and policy guidance proposals. Each has his own portfolio of issues to be dealt with in planning, and Rostow, as one associate puts it, grades them with a steady insistence.

"Walt might be described as the town's great stimulator," says an Administration official. "He's a gadfly, goading and prodding all the time. He loves to talk, of course, like most professors, and he uses the telephone to good advantage. But he's usually on the point."

Another official familiar with Rostow's operation both at the White House and in the State Department, says: "I know there was some worry that once Walt got to State, he'd try end runs around Rusk to get at the President. But he hasn't. He's been dead loyal to the Secretary. Of course, his experience at the White House enables him to ask the right questions, from the President's standpoint. He has one failing, not serious, and that is he tries to do much too quickly. But fortunately there are checks in the bureaucracy against undue haste or imprudent action."

If Rostow has goaded some of his colleagues at State to a point of irritation, they are consoled by the fact that he is not "jurisdiction-minded," as one put it, and has shown no taste for bureaucratic politicking. If he gets into trouble, according to an associate, it will be because of his compulsion to put his thoughts and ideas down in black and white.

"Any articulate idea man bargains for trouble and controversy in this town," the associate said, "and Walt Rostow is both articulate and teeming with ideas."